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THE TEACHING OF ECONOMICS AGAIN¹

The round table discussion on the teaching of economics, held during the 1919 meetings of the American Economic Association, may be taken as evidence that the subject has perennial interest, especially to the constantly increasing numbers of younger economists who have not been as yet deeply stamped by traditional aims and methods or become blasé from long-continued lecturing and quizzing in Economics 1. Unfortunately the round table discussions are but meagerly reported. Judging from the report,² however, they hinged on matters of mechanical detail, especially the problems involved in handling the hordes of students who have swarmed into the introductory course, and dealt scarcely at all with the larger aspects of aims, organization, and adaptation, to which not only the general economic and social movement in the world at large but the great influx of students and the deepening interest in economic problems would seem to require renewed serious attention. Since the conferences on the teaching of economics held in Chicago in 1909 and 1911, the Harvard investigation is the only outstanding attempt to canvass the larger problems involved in the organization, functions, and methods of economics departments and economics teaching.³

Even the Harvard investigation, however, shows unmistakable signs of having at times got lost in a morass of meaningless statistics and attention to mechanical detail. In spite of this defect it is perhaps the most noteworthy contribution to the subject yet made. It is unified—not a series of disconnected papers; it is objective

¹ *The Teaching of Economics in Harvard University* (Harvard Studies in Education, Vol. II). A report presented by the Division of Education at the request of the Department of Economics. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917. Pp. xiii+248.

² *American Economic Review Supplement*, March, 1920, pp. 214, 215.

³ The papers and discussion of the first meeting of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Business should not be overlooked, however. See *Journal of Political Economy*, February, 1920.

and disinterested, and consequently free from the taint of opinionation, and above all it attacks the problem with the breadth of educational insight and perspective which we should expect from a group of educational experts. It is no mere fortuitous result, therefore, that it devotes much attention to the aims of economics teaching and canvasses the actual situation in the light of aims, actual and ideal. It is also representative, as the Preface notes, of a unique event in American education, for it is apparently the first instance in which one university department has asked another to investigate it. It is also an outstanding, if not a unique, instance in which an entire department has been conscious enough of pedagogical problems (a type of problem commonly thought to be meant only for public-school and normal teachers) to wish some external and alien authority to conduct an unrestricted inquisition. Such an inquiry most certainly would reveal in any university department in America (not excepting education departments) more or less noteworthy deficiencies in meeting the demands of good teaching. Its findings may be in part significant only for Harvard, but where they are worth while—in certain particulars they are not, in the present writer's estimation—they will, if given the attention they deserve, assuredly prove productively suggestive for other colleges and universities as well.

It is at least open to suggestion that the present unsettled state of the world's economic life, the rapid movement in industrial reorganization, the redoubled questioning of economic principles, tenets, and crochets, and the unsettled and unsatisfactory, if not actually disorganized and chaotic, state of economic theory, all render desirable, if not mandatory, a searching reanalysis, and probably some really radical reorganization, of aims, methods, curricula, and course-content of our social science departments. Some such thought as this must be accepted as reason enough for an extended, though belated, review of the volume before us.

In spite of the fact that a considerable portion of the report is devoted to matters of mechanical detail, we may regard *functional organization* as its keynote, although this expression is nowhere used. And the functional organization considered is that of teaching. Research, publication, and extra-mural activities on the

part of faculty members do not come within the scope of the inquiry. The task of organization for the efficient functioning of social-science teaching in the educational process involves the organization (*a*) of courses, (*b*) of the Department of Economics curriculum, (*c*) of the interrelation and sequence of courses, etc., in the Division of History, Government, and Economics.

The indispensable basis of and guide to functional organization is aim or purpose. This the report fully emphasizes, and by far the best parts of it are those dealing with aims. To a large extent aims determine methods; and discussion of methods, whether of departmental organization or the conduct of class exercises, is sure to be inconclusive and unconvincing unless based upon an understanding, if not an agreement, as to aims. It does not follow, however, that any and every sort of aim, however definitely conceived by the teacher, will serve as basis for an effective method in teaching economics—or any other social science. At least three factors are involved in the functional teaching of economics—the nature of the subject, the capacity and personality of the teacher, and the student; and the last is by no means the least important factor. For no aim and no method will function if it does not engage the real interest of the student; not interest in grades, nor in the subject per se, nor yet again in the personality of the teacher, but interest in the subject and the teacher's presentation of it, in relation to the contribution it is consciously conceived (either on faith or by demonstration) to be able to make to the students' relation to life and society. This functional character of courses and teaching may be in the nature of an opportunity merely to satisfy a thirst for knowledge (curiosity). If so, however, experience shows that it will not be of great importance as a motive among American college students of the present generation. It may have reference to good citizenship and still be of somewhat doubtful force. It may conceivably be an opportunity to satisfy desire for distinction through "culture." But in the main the teaching of economics, as of other subjects, will be productive of real results, in student interest and study, in about the proportion that some sort of actual or potential vocational or "life-career" function is felt to be inherent in it.

Just here two important points of damaging criticism stand out with regard to the teaching of economics at Harvard, and, by unavoidable implication, probably at other places. Most members of the instructing staff were hazy in their description of the aims of their respective courses; and, to a certain degree, the courses are said not to be "real" to the student. On these points the report speaks in no uncertain terms. The Education Department skilfully seizes the opportunity to whip American undergraduate education in general over the shoulder of economics instruction in particular.

College teaching tends to present all subjects from a scientific point of view; it is likely to be academic—and the teaching of economics escapes neither the advantages nor the disadvantages of the tendency. It expounds to inexperienced young men theories and masses of information before they have become acquainted in any personal way with the elementary facts, processes, and situations with which the subject deals. It requires a great deal of listening and reading, and very little observation, practical judgment, or active decision. Its issues are not significant at the moment: they induce effort to make them clear only for the immediate purpose of passing examinations or presenting good theses. . . .

College teaching . . . tends to the disconnected. . . . This tendency the Division of History, Government, and Economics is already vigorously combatting by its recent adoption of divisional examinations and tutorial instruction. But even the new scheme runs the risk of remaining artificial if the schedules it involves are made without clear reference to the purpose of the students who elect to follow them—without reference, that is, to the legitimate outcome of any schedule in practical activity or further study [pp. 11-13].

Partly because of this emphasis on subject, and concentration by subjects and departments, to the resultant (at least partial) failure to utilize the vocational motive—partly, also, because "college teaching tends to miss the individual"—there loomed "larger and more impressive throughout the inspection" the conclusion "that college teaching too often fails to reach the student" (p. 14).

This conclusion flows from the inquiry into instructors' aims, and from a large number of answers to questionnaires sent to students and alumni. While the alumni answers relate mostly to methods, and are in any case for various reasons not to be taken too seriously, a study of the published material from the students and the analysis

of instructors' statements of aim reinforces the conviction that aim or purpose is the fulcrum upon which efficient economics teaching turns.

The aims given by the eight instructors who answered the committee's letter of inquiry (sent out in 1913) leave much to be desired, at least from the functional point of view adumbrated above. "Some of the letters state or imply that the instructor had not previously given definite form to the aims of his courses." The replies, as well as the drift of testimony from questionnaires and visits, "provide no evidence . . . of a consistent and clearly enunciated educational policy, in the light of which the aims of particular courses may be stated" (p. 17).

The committee endeavors to exonerate the instructors from addiction to the discarded "formal discipline" theory, but its own analysis of the statements of aims (pp. 19-32), as well as the summary of instructors' aims (pp. 101, 102), seems to suggest that the old theory is very close at hand. There is little indication that the formulation of aims was made with any remoter object or contingency in mind than the immediate juxtaposition of teacher, student, and subject-matter. The phrases "critical analysis," "independent thinking," "analytical judgment," appear repeatedly. They connote, of course, *immediate* aims which every teacher of economics (and of most other subjects) would instantly acquiesce in as necessary and desirable—a matter of course, in fact—in all education. But they suggest nothing as to the purpose of all this analytical judgment or cogent reasoning power. By themselves they represent the acme of scholasticism—scholarship for scholarship's sake.

The statements as a group . . . convey the impression that the work is organized primarily to cover the field, never, to be sure, without reference to the uses of knowledge, insight, and technical skill, but without ruling interest in the situations in which the student will find himself outside of college. The fact that the student will be an active participant in economic life is not ignored; but the main picture . . . is of one whose need is first of all for systematic or scientific knowledge. There is no lack of reference to the student, nor to the qualifications he must have to be successful in the work of the courses. There is less reference to the question, what will he use his achievement in the courses *for*? (p. 21).

The deficiencies here suggested are of course not peculiar to the Harvard Economics Department (even if it may not by this time have removed them); they are vital shortcomings of American undergraduate education in general. Lack of functional aim, definite enough to be real, may be set down as the fundamental cause for the low efficiency of our colleges. And this deficiency is to be attributed largely to the academic "cultural" tradition which still maintains a strangle hold on many otherwise efficient faculties. Functional aim may be present in individual courses or even in individual departments, but it cannot reach its normal influence unless there is consciousness of it and agreement as to what it is in the several related departments, and indeed in the institution as a whole.

As the report says, "The problem concerns not single courses only, but the whole curriculum of the student in the given field." Where, as at Harvard, the principles of concentration and distribution of elections and the divisional examination have been established, the bearing of cordial correlation and substantial agreement as to functional aim is evident.

The question is, From what point of view shall those comprehensive aims be stated which are to govern the conduct of the total offering of undergraduate instruction in economics? (p. 22).

The committee finds that the courses in economics are not as a whole directed toward vocations. Neither is there any clear indication that preparation for participation in political, philanthropic, and governmental activity is the dominant aim. (This is perhaps the reason why, in some places, the field of economics is constantly being encroached upon by departments of government and business administration, with their aggressive functional aims as backing.)

The report proceeds, in a passage of great cogency, to its verdict against general cultural aims as sufficient to economics courses. It does not prescribe the vocational aim to the exclusion of others, nor does it give evidence that its definition of vocation, if given, would be narrow. Its conclusion we can agree with:

The purely cultural aim is too indefinite to be accepted as the complete and sufficient purpose of a college education in which such a subject as econom-

ics is to have any considerable part. . . . Direct preparation both for vocation and for general social service would appear also properly to enter as a factor in the aims of instruction [p. 26].

The discussion of aims—most valuable part of the report as it is—still leaves something to be desired in the way of more definitely constructive suggestion as to aims in economics teaching at the present juncture in the social movement. If the economists are a bit lacking in educational technique, the pedagogues are (avowedly) deficient in intimate knowledge of economics and of the specific problems confronting economics teachers the moment they make serious attempt to “connect up” their teaching with the real life of today.

The cultural aim—at least as the undergraduate is likely to understand “culture”—is not only inadequate but may be positively vicious.¹ The vocational aim, on the other hand, has too frequently degenerated into a pursuit of pecuniary privilege, materialistic and commercial, in the bad sense of both terms. The vocational aim may be mere superficial temporizing with things as they are—at its worst leading to training for “the predatory culture.” The teacher of economics worthy of his hire will not be content with such an end and purpose to his work.

The committee avers that “college teaching tends to present all subjects from a scientific point of view.” Perhaps it does, but the “scientific” tendency is sometimes rather tenuous, even in economics. The prime characteristic of science is *factual objectivity*—to see things as they are. That is the *alpha* of scientific method. The rest is logic and ethics. The first commandment to be laid on economists is today, as never before, to see economic fact as it is. And never was the task more difficult—so difficult that it is a question whether most men and women who got their academic training and economic intellectual “set” over ten years ago can be relied upon to compass it. Teachers of economics everywhere, as well as writers of texts, should realize the difficulty and the dynamic quality of the task imposed upon them by the present rapid flux of economic organization, relations, standards, ideals, and issues.

¹ Readers who are inclined to take issue will do well to reread Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* and *The Higher Learning*.

Simple classical postulates, or the fine logic-chopping of psychological hedonism (pseudo-psychologic marginalism), etc., *may* be adequate guides to the shifting and labyrinthine economic process, but the chances are that those who rely too faithfully upon them will find themselves led at last through beaten trails of functionless logic to barren mesas of academic futility. Science is always realistic, and the crying need now is for a realistic economics and realistic economics teaching—in Economics 1, in advanced undergraduate courses, and in graduate seminars. In how many hundred American colleges are students being fed up on the false hedonism of diminishing and marginal utility, on the false assumption of the pervasiveness of free competition, and on the barren doctrines of marginal productivity and marginal sacrifice? Perhaps it is too much to ask that we should attain to an actual inductive method in so complex a field of economics; but it is hardly to be questioned that theory, texts, and teaching all leave very much to be desired in the way of factual objectivity—the groundwork of truth. Something of this thought may be in the committee's mind when it reiterates its suggestion of lack of connection between economics teaching and real life. Certain difficulties attend any attempt at a truly scientific presentation of economic knowledge (as contrasted with philosophical doctrine concerning economic "principles"). The exceeding complexity of the facts and the special interests and personal equations involved in them make it not infrequently impossible to see a situation in any thing like its true proportions or entirety. Whole categories of fact are sedulously concealed, e.g., rates of profits, monopoly agreements, etc., as well as policies regarding limitation of output, inside gangs in control of trade-union policy, blackmail strikes, etc., and are but partially and fitfully brought to light by government investigation. Nevertheless our texts and classrooms could accomplish a great deal more than is accomplished in the way of presenting a picture of the actual organization and operation of the existing economic society. This will involve, even in Economics 1, extensive use of illustrative material, material not limited to innocuous description of mechanical detail but material which throws light upon the concrete essential facts of control and

organization, however damaging they may be to the traditional belief that there is nothing essentially wrong with the present system, or to either conservative, liberal, or radical notions of reform. Were the material made available for large numbers of students, it exists, in sufficiently representative bulk, in (for example) the reports of the Federal Trade Commission, and the packers' replies to the Report on the Meat-packing Industry, the Pujo Committee Report, and Mr. Morgan's reply, the Report of the Industrial Relations Commission, the publications of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, court decisions, and a variety of private and semi-public sources. "If society is to be made to serve the best interests of nations and peoples, we shall have to study the system as it is, and endeavor to reveal its weaknesses, as well as its points of strength, to the end that its glaring defects may be intelligently remedied."¹ This concrete, realistic revelation necessitates a nearer approach than we have yet made to an inductive case method. The practical difficulties in achieving it, especially in Economics 1, where it is most needed because the bulk of students do not go farther and must here if anywhere get realistic insight into economic fact, lie in two directions. First, existing texts (exclusive of certain "source books," which, however, rapidly become out of date) do not lend themselves to it. The reasons for this are obvious enough. Secondly, the elusiveness of some of the material, the rapidity of change, and the great number of students to be served militate against it. Economics teaching, if it is to be realistic, and as little tinctured with doctrinaire attitudes as possible, must be up to the minute in its cognizance of economic phenomena. When the "old order changeth," either by way of revolution or intensive reform, the economic principles enunciated must, to be serviceable, be based upon the changing situation, not upon mid-Victorian philosophy. From this point of view, is it too much to say that there is not now a single satisfactory text for the introductory course?

Practically the only way to this realism is the co-operative supply of mimeographed or printed loose-leaf material. A bureau

¹ Moulton, "An Appraisal of Carver's Economics," *Journal of Political Economy*, April, 1920, p. 331.

for this purpose should be established without delay. Only through some such arrangement will it be easy to secure the change in economics instruction now called for.

"Factual objectivity" must not be taken in too physical a sense. The facts of economic life are not only commodities, land, labor, capital, markets, and various other tangible and visible things; they may also include very human habit, feeling, valuation, attitude, etc. If there is social unrest, based upon a conviction that economic distribution is at present unjust, that unrest and that conviction are economic facts. Ethics and economics, to say nothing of economics and politics, now are interwoven as never before. Any attempt to maintain the classical fiction of rigid separation between economics and ethics is not only likely to be a failure, but will tend to be vicious. At the least it fails to utilize one of the strongest interest-motives which actuate young men and women to thought on social questions. The traditional unwillingness of economists to consider ethical implications has ostensibly been based upon the practical need of a division of intellectual labor and upon the contention that ethics is a matter of opinion, while economic value, for example, is a concrete objective, measurable fact. The economist wanted to be free for objective investigation, undisturbed by differences of opinion or standard as to ethical valuations. In reality, however, he unavowedly, perhaps unconsciously, held and taught certain definite ethical ideas and norms. In other words, there was a semi-concealed doctrinal basis or background for his "science."

We view all things against some background and in some sort of perspective. We have some sort of philosophy of life as the background, and a set of attitudes which determine the perspective. Analysis of these backgrounds and attitudes (so far as they touch economics) always reveals their essential nature to be a theory or conception of the purpose or function of social or economic activity. That the theory is usually the result of tradition and habit, and is rarely definitely formulated, does not argue that it is not present—and present as a guide to conduct. We cannot see the full facts of economic life in their essential significance unless they are projected upon the ethical background of aim and purpose. Nor

will seeing be much more than a sensuous exercise unless it be designed to function, sooner or later, as a guide to action. It follows that economics teaching will be relatively barren (from any large social-productivity point of view) unless it be kept in intimate touch with, indeed infused with, ethical considerations.

Classical concepts and methods do not meet the needs of the present situation. World-interest is today centered in ethical issues, and there is a dramatic clash of ethical standards. It would be foolish to try to evade these issues; it is little short of criminal not to teach economics and the other social sciences in a manner to lead students to an intimate cognizance of them. Primarily the ethical postulates in any type of theory should be pointed out, in the interests of scientific honesty and as appeal to student interest. This means no retreat from the scientific method; on the contrary it would betoken a nearer approach to it.

The conclusion we would draw from this necessarily brief and somewhat abstract discussion of functional aim in relation to effectiveness of method is that neither the old-time formal discipline and cultural, nor the more recent vocational, motives are adequate incentives and guides to economics study and instruction. Discipline, culture, and vocation all have a legitimate place in the purpose of economics teaching, but all three must be so pointed as to appeal to, arouse, develop, and utilize the interest of youth in ethical questions, to secure as nearly as may be a true conception of present-day economic society, and to motivate a social citizenship which will grapple with its defects in a broad, scientific, progressive spirit. Economics, together with the other social sciences, has not only to secure and impart scientific knowledge with regard to society, but to equip the student to choose intelligently the attitude he will take in the presence of its issues and problems. It is upon this latter point that the critic feels some hesitancy in granting an unqualified indorsement of too limited a vocational aim, or of the schools of business administration, both in their point of view and in their influence upon the teaching of economics.

The remaining portion of the report—the greater part of it—calls for less extended comment. The investigators proceeded

upon the belief that information should be sought in the form of verifiable and, where possible, quantitative records. In consequence the bulk of the report consists of statistical analysis, with a liberal use of graphs. The result of all this attempt at quantitative study, which represents much arduous labor, is of comparatively little value. Chapter iii, for instance, "Quantitative Studies of Students' Records—Studies on Correlation," covers forty pages, almost all of which deal with grades as a basis for measuring correlation between various groups of courses, inside and outside the Department of Economics. Unless conclusions that are mainly negative are considered valuable, the whole chapter brings out nothing that can be of any great service in the improvement of teaching and curriculum. Less than a fifth of the students¹ who took two or more courses in economics concentrated in the group comprising history, government, philosophy, and fine arts; these students received A or B in about a fifth more cases than students who were classified in other groups. The conclusion drawn from this "that there is no reason to believe . . . that interest in mathematics and science promises well for success in economics," is not particularly significant or helpful. Again we learn that about one-half of those who receive E in Economics A continue in the department, and about three-fourths of those receiving other grades, but that, leaving out the E students, the grade received in the introductory course has no particular effect on election of advanced courses; standing in the introductory course, however, is a fairly reliable indication of a student's advance into strictly graduate study—all of which is interesting, but of somewhat occult practical significance. More interesting, and probably of more meaning, is the conclusion that standing in Economics A "is not, under present conditions, a very reliable guide to probable standing in advanced courses." To the extent that this is true it would seem to indicate that something is wrong with the grading system, or that Economics A, or the advanced courses, or both, need readjustment. Is it true at Harvard, as it appears to be elsewhere, that the student who gets through the grind of the first-year course thereafter finds relatively easy sailing because the advanced courses

¹ Between 1904-5 and 1912-13.

are not graded up in difficulty and amount of work required? Or, again, may it be that our introductory courses, conventionally designed to introduce students to principles, fail to give those principles reality (even when they have it) and hence fall short of connecting up with the more definite and usually more concrete matters presented in advanced courses?

Another chapter (vii) is devoted to a study of marking. Minute comparison is made of the marking of the various instructors, especially in Economics A, where a great lack of uniformity or standardization is revealed. This seems a matter of great concern to the investigators, as indeed does the whole subject of grading. Not entirely, as the cynical critic might aver, because here is a subject of inquiry which lends itself admirably to the tabulation, score-carding, calculating of correlation coefficients, and graph-drawing which are just now so dear to the heart of scientific students and professors of education, but avowedly because careless grading is unfair and unjust to the student. So much is made of this point that were one to read only these portions of the report, one might suppose that in the investigators' opinion the chief purpose in teaching were the meticulous ranking of students at the end of the course. Frankly, all this attention to grades, grade standards, and fairness and care in grading is misplaced, not to say uneconomical. If grades and rank lists are to be the main or even an important incentive to scholarship, then of course the instructor should worry over the fairness of his grades. But if some more essential and substantial incentive to scholarly application and achievement is present, as most will avow it should be, then the whole question of marks and ranks is a somewhat adventitious matter, serviceable primarily to the deans' and recorders' offices, but of little after-significance to the student or anybody else. Time spent in deciding whether Smith should have a C— or a D+ and whether Brown should have an E or a passing grade would in most cases be better spent in cogitation on significant economic problems, or in personal and friendly conversation with Smith as to what he means to do with his life. For after all, if there is doubt as to Brown's possession of enough knowledge to pass the course, Brown should repeat it and demonstrate beyond

doubt that he knows something worth while about it. If he cannot do so, he should be *spurlos versenkt*. Grading and statistics about grading are the dry husks of teaching, and it is not by much attention to such mechanical accompaniments that college teaching is to gain in vitality and functional value.

Fortunately, attention to mechanics does not monopolize the energies of the investigators. Much matter of real interest and suggestive value is to be found in the chapters on minor proposals and questionnaires. In the first of these, among other matters, are discussed habits of study in Economics A and other courses. Individual student records obtained in response to a letter sent out by the committee lead to the following conclusion:

These records give strong support to a common impression, namely, that college students are engaged for the most part in preparing for examinations, tests, papers, and *seldom look beyond these immediate objectives*. The questions with which lectures and textbooks deal *are not real to them*. Their practical business at the moment is to "pass the course."

Here the committee puts its finger squarely upon the central evil of American undergraduate life—or shall we say of American college faculties? Between the student, possibly interested in nothing more vital than athletics and dances, perhaps honestly trying to make connection with something "real" in his college courses, and the professor, too often engaged in the technicalities and minutiae of his subject (or the instructor bent on "getting out" a *magnum opus*, or the tutor worrying over his uncompleted doctoral thesis), undergraduate education comes perilously near to falling between two stools, and has about it entirely too much of the suggestion that, whatever its conscious aims, it in fact has certain analyzable characteristics constituting collectively an expensive system of make-believe. The committee, let us hasten to say, makes no such heretical observations; and what is here suggested is of course not intended to apply to economics more (rather less) than to other disciplines, and certainly not to Harvard more than to other colleges. In fact, cognizance of what the Harvard Division of History, Government, and Economics has instituted in the way of examinations over the whole field of the group—a requirement now being copied by other divisions—suggests that Harvard is in

the vanguard, if not the most exposed advanced outpost, of endeavor to secure unity and definite functional purpose to undergraduate study.

The committee continues:

As to methods of study the records show that students are largely innocent of any knowledge of the different requirements of different tasks. They seldom think out cases, problems, exceptions, contrary positions, applications, or corollaries. They try to understand, fix the material in mind, pick out the important points [and, the committee should have added, guess what questions will be asked on examination]. Instruction in study is needed and specific directions for particular pieces of work.

The evidence . . . agrees admirably with the evidence from questionnaires, from our visits and from other minor studies in supporting the general conclusion that there is a great and unnecessary waste of time in college work.

Most of us are aware of all this, but it is reassuring to have it on the authoritative basis of painstaking, disinterested research. The committee's recommendations at this point, however, are not especially practical. Of course "instruction in study" is needed. No one who has not taught in universities which draft their students largely from second-rate high schools with crowded "make-believe" curricula can sense just how great the need is for instruction in study—to say nothing of development of *taste for* study. Perhaps, after all, *there* lies the chief obstruction to efficient academic life. For it would be an unwarrantable assumption to hold that the average run of boys and girls go, or are sent, to college today to study, when he who runs may read the fact that "student activities" and social life are the main show. The committee's thought that much of this waste of time (in attempted study) "could be prevented by more careful attention on the part of instructors (and professors?) to the problems of teaching as such—not merely to modes of presentation in class, but to the *guidance of individuals* in their learning," is immediately conditioned by the reflexion that "the university must first change its method of estimating the work a teacher ought to carry."

These suggestions call for comment. In the first place, upon what ground are we to suppose that instructors, being no less subject to human frailty and to a need of board and clothes than other individuals, will spontaneously give more careful attention

to the problems of teaching as such? Is there anything in their graduate training to have suggested to them such necessity or even desirability?¹ The committee holds, in another connection (p. 13), that "college teaching tempts instructors to slight the laborious detail of instruction—the minutiae of method, marking, and the administration of requirements, the tediousness of conferences, thesis reading, and the checking of results," and again (p. 14) that "the policy of expecting every college teacher to produce has been beneficial to many instructors and harmful to many students." We may agree with the committee's thought that personal contact is the heart of education, and that time spent in it ought never to burden a college teacher's conscience as time wasted. But merely reiterating, in passing, the conviction that much time spent in the minutiae of marking, etc., *is* wasted, are we not bound to remember that instructors are in practice advanced in rank and salary quite as much (if not more) on the basis of their research capacity as shown by publication as on proficiency in teaching? Be the ideal what it may, the hard, patent fact is that only those men are regarded as first rate who demonstrate ability in monograph and book-making, whatever their capacity as teachers may be. In the second place, it is somewhat idle, under present circumstances, to talk of "guidance of *individuals* in their learning" when colleges and universities are literally swamped by ever-increasing hordes of students, and presidents and trustees are much put to it to keep salaries within hailing distance of the cost of living and obtain the extra men needed to handle the increase of students. It is not, of course, impracticable for already well-endowed institutions to look forward to tutorial systems and individual touch and guidance. But for the great bulk of American colleges and universities—especially the state universities—we might as well frankly recognize that the educational process, now and for an indefinite time in the future, is a mass phenomenon, out of which here and there a fortunate or persistent student will emerge as a distinct, interesting, and promising personality, by chance, or by reason of distinguishably superior

¹ Cf. "The Graduate School, Faculty Responsibility, and the Training of University Teachers," *School and Society*, September 15, 1916.

endowment. When Economics 1 has 1,300 students, as was the case last year in one middle-western university, and when, as was the case in another, a president balks at paying an instructor for quiz sections \$1,400, we need not be too sanguine about improvement in economics instruction through the method of individualization.

The problem of section meetings and assistants in the introductory course receives deservedly careful attention at the hands of the committee. Much evidence in graduate questionnaires and elsewhere is adduced to show dissatisfaction with the section meetings and leaders. The usual charges against the assistants are made (by students and alumni) and are in part upheld by the committee. The assistants are held to lack teaching experience, to be out of touch with the students and with actual life, to be more interested in hair-splitting logic than in essentials, etc. The report lists thirteen distinct points on which the conduct of quiz sections is adversely criticized by students (pp. 165, 166). This opens up the whole question of what is, all things considered, the best organization of Economics 1. Probably the ruling arrangement in American universities now is one lecture a week to the whole class—usually several hundred—followed by two quiz, or discussion, meetings in sections ranging from fifteen to thirty-five members. The lectures are given by a professor, or professors, of mature training and experience. This is as it should be, for the introduction to a subject, especially where the majority of students will go little farther in it, should be under the direction and inspiration of men who know the field broadly and thoroughly and who presumably will give the presentation what may be called a functional perspective—a perspective, that is, which has reference not only to the subject per se but to the students' experience and interests, and to the economic, social, and political situation at the time existent. Yet lectures exclusively by the older men may leave something to be desired in freshness and in point of view. The chief trouble, however, lies in the sections. Two plans are possible. We may either hire instructors, men and women of Ph.D. training for the section work, or we may (as is apparently the common practice) appoint graduate students (in some places

even Juniors and Seniors) as tutors and assistants. Section leaders should without fail hear the lectures each week. If we hire instructors, two difficulties at once appear. Men of doctoral rank will feel it beneath their dignity to attend the lectures and "do the routine drudgery"; and, moreover, even if they are content to do so, no instructor can long keep intellectually alive on a constant repetition of section work. A sufficient supply of instructor personnel is not at present available, in any case. The assistant and tutor plan has much to be said in its favor. There are usually a sufficient number of promising graduate students, some with teaching experience, who intend to teach economics as a profession, and who accordingly are attracted not so much by the "modest stipend" usually offered as by the opportunity to try their hand in the university classroom. Their interest in economic problems is fresh and their perspective and viewpoint are not always so far inferior as might be imagined to those of instructors and professors, and they have the incentive of "making good." Their position provides occasion for stimulative personal contact with the professors, while at the same time they are usually in more intimate touch with student life. Where serious fault is to be found with their work, it may usually be traced to lack of care in their selection, to a forced necessity of appointing men of doubtful ability, and to a lack of proper contact and supervision (through standardization of assignments, and through frequent discussion of the problems and progress of the course) on the part of the professor in charge. It is, of course, undesirable to appoint undergraduates or men whose central vocational interest does not lie in economics.

It is a noteworthy fact that most of the numerous inquiries and disquisitions on the teaching of economics, the present one being no exception, seem to assume that only boys or men take economics. This ignoring of the existence of women students is to be expected at Harvard (we are uncertain whether Radcliffe is an integral part of the university) and other men's schools, but it is inexcusable in those who are in direction of departmental affairs in co-educational institutions. It is safe to predict, however, that the next few years will develop a diminution of the current tendency for women to elect preponderantly sociology courses, eschewing

especially applied economics. They will probably be led in rapidly increasing numbers by vocational and political interest into practically every field of economic study. At present they probably as a rule find the introductory course somewhat more difficult than do the men, but so far we have seen no solicitude as to how the course may be made more "real" to them. Perhaps there is no need of it. In the mass phenomenon we call education, sex lines are rapidly disappearing.

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